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A

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

CHARACTER AND REIGN

OF

LOUIS XVI. K

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HOW LITTLE HE DESERVED, FROM HIS UNGRATEFUL
PEOPLE, THE NAME OF TYRANT.

TO WHICH IS SUBJOINED,
A CORRECTED TRANSLATION OF HIS LAST WILL.

This was drawn up by Mr. Nares.

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A SHORT ACCOUNT, &c.

CHARACTER AND REIGN

THE enemies of this unfortunate prince
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were, to murder him, presented him to
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that odious to all eyes, to offend, retard
or destroy their liberty. Indeed this char-
acter had belonged to him, though his
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by their own laws which they had sworn
to observe: there would be less reason to
grieve him: he might have fallen wrongfully
but not innocent. But if he was, in all
things, the very reverse of that description
if he was of a mild and generous disposition
ready at all times to make any sacrifice



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A SHORT ACCOUNT, &c.

THE enemies of this unfortunate prince, thinking it necessary to make him odious, before they could venture, powerful as they were, to murder him, represented him to the people as *a tyrant*; as one, *whose constant endeavour it had been, to obstruct, retard, or destroy their liberty*. If indeed this character had belonged to him, though his condemnation would still have been unjust, by their own laws which they had sworn to observe, there would be less reason to regret him; he might have fallen wrongfully, but not innocent. But if he was, in all things, the very reverse of that description; if he was of a mild and generous disposition, ready at all times to make any sacrifice,

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however great, for the good of his people ; if he made such sacrifices willingly, when no men had the power to force him ; if he was, in all situations, anxious for their safety, careless of his own, unwilling that a single drop of blood should be shed on his account, even in the most just defence ; if this was his true character, and can be proved by all the actions of his reign, the hateful name of *Tyrant* must belong most properly to them who, in defiance of all justice, dared to brand him with it.

As we have heard, from the beginning of the troubles of his kingdom in 1789, that he gave way on almost every occasion ; and sometimes to demands so very extravagant, that it might naturally be thought no king would ever have assented to them, it has been generally supposed, till lately, that he was weak and timid. In this respect, the dreadful close of his mild reign and blameless life has but too fully justified him. He
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has displayed, at this period, a courage not to be shaken by the most tremendous situations, a presence of mind not to be put off its guard by the most ensnaring questions. Knowing this, we now find it necessary to believe, that every sacrifice he made of his own interests, rights, and happiness, was made sincerely, though not always prudently, with the hope of giving happiness to all his people.

To give a general view of the character of this worthy monarch, this good-hearted conscientious man, we may use the words of those who knew him best. M. Necker, for seven years his minister, and part of the time forced upon him, in a way which could produce no great affection between them, thus writes of him :—" I doubt whether among the public men, alas ! now left alive, there is one who had more means of knowing him than myself ; not only because I served him seven years, but also,

because the nature of my ministry obliged me to submit to him the greatest number of affairs: and I here declare, to the face of his enemies, and in all the sincerity of my heart, *that I have never observed, that I have never seen, even by surprise, in this monarch treated with such cruelty, a single voluntary movement, a single sentiment derived from his own soul, and properly his own, which was not exactly conformable to the laws of morality and honour; and which did not display to an attentive observer his desire of doing good, his compassion for the people, the natural sweetness and moderation of his temper.* Let the testimony of a man be believed, who though long about the King, is now connected with him neither by gratitude nor hope. I never suffered him to gratify himself by bestowing on me a favour, and I am now retired for ever from the world.”—*Reflexions présentées à la Nation Française, p. 17.*

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But the evidence of a violent Revolutionist, and determined enemy to the royal power, may also be produced in favour of Louis XVI. The testimony of one who, as he hated the authority, would probably have hated also the person of the King, could he have discovered in his character any thing to justify such an enmity. This is M. Rabaud de St. Etienne, author of a Republican History of the Revolution of France.

In June 1789, when the Duke de Liancourt went in private to the King, to persuade him to dismiss the troops which then surrounded Paris, he succeeded, by representing to him the misery and slaughter likely to be produced by violent measures. On this occasion, M. Rabaud thus expresses himself in his history: "All that Louis requires is to have counsellors who are worthy of his heart, that heart naturally inclined to benevolence." In another passage
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he describes him in these words: "A Prince, whose manners were naturally simple and correct, who took no delight in pomp, whose wants were limited, and *who had no other wish than to see his people happy.*" After describing the King's flight, his being taken at Varennes, and brought back a prisoner to Paris, the same historian thus speaks of him. "The King declared, among other things, that his intention had been to go to Montmedy (a French town on the frontier), in order to prove to all the world that he was free; to secure the kingdom from foreign invasion, by a vigilant attention to the frontiers, and to visit every place where he might consider his presence to be necessary." "Several," he adds, "were convinced of the sincerity of the King, *to whom no scheme hath ever been proposed, which was not calculated to interest his heart.* His advisers would not have presumed to own to him, *that he was going to make war upon his people.*"

Many

Many more testimonies from very competent and respectable witnesses, such as M. Lally Tollendal, &c. might easily be collected; but this extorted by the mere force of truth from an enemy to Royalty, must be more convincing than a thousand others, which might perhaps be suspected of partiality.

But of all proofs, those drawn from facts are most decisive. A short sketch, therefore, of such actions of the reign of Louis XVI. as mark beyond a doubt his genuine disposition and character, will refute, and put to everlasting shame, the malice of those enemies who have described him by the name of *Tyrant*. A tyrant whose whole reign consisted of endeavours to relieve the sufferings of his people, and of sacrifices to comply with their desires!

Louis XVI. succeeded to the crown of his grandfather Louis XV. in 1774, at the age of twenty. His first feelings and conduct,

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on coming to the throne, proved the integrity and candour of his mind. Instead of being intoxicated, as youth might naturally be, with such an elevation, he was only struck with dread and diffidence at the weight of duties belonging to his crown. In the first edict of his reign this feeling was thus expressed: "Seated on the throne, to which it has pleased God to raise me, I trust his goodness will support my youth, and guide me to the means *by which I may make my people happy.*" In the same edict he declared, what, to the last moment of his life, his actions proved, "that for the sake of his people, *no sacrifice would ever seem to him too great.*" [Edict, June 1774.]

His father, the Dauphin, who died in 1765, has long been justly celebrated, as a man of singular virtue and religious goodness. While he lived he attended most strictly to the education of his children, and to the care of filling them with pious and bene-

benevolent dispositions. Louis XVI. though he had so early lost this excellent father, lost not the respect due to his great goodness; and one of the first ministers appointed by him was M. du Muy, whom his father had strongly recommended. The others were such as only a virtuous Prince would choose, men known to the public for their talents, or particularly distinguished by popular favour. Of these, M. Turgot, whom he long honoured with the name of *Friend*, was in his heart a democrat; M. de Mirosmenil was then actually in banishment for opposition to the court.

His reign was immediately marked by acts of justice and utility. The purpose of an edict in November of the same year 1774, was to lower the price of corn, by making the circulation of it within the kingdom more easy. His next step was to recal the *Parlemens*, or chief courts of justice throughout the kingdom, which Louis XV. had

lately banished for opposition to his measures; but Louis XVI. hastened to show that he preferred justice to power: On the 3d of January 1775 he abolished the oppressive mode of collecting taxes, by consolidating a certain sum upon a certain district, by which the honest and industrious had been forced to pay for the idle and dishonest. About the same time some wicked people, who found their private interest hurt by his regulations concerning corn, contrived, by various arts, to stir up insurrections. Here the goodness of the King was strikingly displayed. His proclamations were full of affection and mercy; and when he sent M. Turgot to Paris, to quell the tumult there, his words were such as were much celebrated then, and deserve for ever to be remembered: "Go, my friend," said he, "whoever has a conscience as clear as yours and mine, can have no fear of men."

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The formidable power of issuing the *lettres de catchet* he entrusted to the most upright magistrate that could be found, and one most famous for persevering opposition to oppressive measures, M. de Malesherbes. At the same time he caused an entire reform to be made in the state-prisons, and set at liberty all persons unjustly confined; and so little was he inclined to any harshness of that kind, that many years after, when the Bastile was destroyed, there were found in it only six prisoners. Louis endeavoured next to abolish the slavish right of personal service, exacted by the proprietors of land from their tenants, under the old laws. But here his benevolent designs were defeated, by the very *parlemens* he had so lately recalled from banishment. On the failure of this measure, his minister, Turgot, was obliged to resign; and M. de Malesherbes requested his dismissal also; but the King very strongly resisted the departure

parture of this worthy man. When he still persisted in desiring it, and alledged as his reason, "that he found it impossible to do good;"—"Well, Sir," replied the King, "must I then also resign my place?" evidently meaning, that as he could not give up his throne on account of such disappointments, it was the duty of an honest man to share them with him, and to bear his part in those mortifications and difficulties which it was impossible for his Sovereign to avoid.

Though baffled in this first attempt to give freedom to the peasants of his kingdom, Louis did not cease to pursue an object so desirable to a feeling mind. In 1779 he abolished servitude in all the royal domains; and though he had found it impracticable to force them to it, he invited all proprietors of land to follow his example. About the same time he began to establish provincial assemblies throughout France, for the regulation of taxes, and other matters, which,

which, till then, had been managed, arbitrarily and oppressively, by the officers of an absolute crown. By the aid of these assemblies he gradually obtained his great object, the abolition of personal servitude, and other oppressive customs.

In 1780 he put an end for ever to the inhuman practice, so long a disgrace to the French law, called the *Preparatory Question*: by which was meant the torturing of persons accused, before trial, to make them confess the crimes laid to their charge. In this horrid custom the innocent had been of course confounded with the guilty. One such act of justice and humanity, in his reign of an absolute monarch, might surely have excused much greater faults than Louis ever had.

An arbitrary and oppressive tax, called the *Taille*, was by him lightened, and confined to a fixed regulation. The establishments of the Royal Hospitals were by him made

made effectual for the relief of the poor; and new institutions of that kind were founded; as were also free-schools of various kinds for instruction in matters most important to the public welfare. In a word, wherever we turn our eyes throughout France or her colonies, during the reign of this good King, we find his benevolent heart exerting itself to destroy abuses, put an end to oppression, and establish useful regulations.

In 1787, the calling together of the *Notables*, or eminent men of the country, to deliberate on the state of the nation, was the act of his wish, in imitation of the patriotic King Henry IV. From this act he conceived such hopes, unfortunately false ones, of public advantage, that on the day after he had issued his edict for that purpose, he wrote to his minister these words, with his own hand: "I know not how you may have passed the night, but for my
part,

part, I have not once been able to close my eyes for joy."

Finally, the proposal of assembling the States General, which unhappily brought on his ruin, was at first his own free act, for the sake of giving relief and satisfaction to his people*. Throughout the tumults that ensued, it is well known with what an air of entire sincerity and truth, he constantly, in private and in public, declared himself ready to make any sacrifice for his people's happiness; how he refused to fly at times of greatest danger, when all who should have guarded him had fled, lest he should occasion the beginning of a civil war; and lastly, when he was at length persuaded to fly, for the reasons mentioned

* At the meeting of the States, some of his expressions well represented the feelings of his heart, "Come," said he to his people, "*partake of my power, and give me more of your love.*" In another part of his speech he said, "*I am the best friend of my people;*" on which the audience shouted, "*We believe it, and return your friendship.*" Alas, how dreadful the return they were ere long to make!

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above, how he absolutely refused to be defended by the loss of any lives. In August 1789, he was solemnly proclaimed, *Restorer of the Liberty of France*; a title which might have proved as glorious to the nation as to him, had his people been as sincere in their desire of true liberty, as he was in his wish to see them free and happy.

This man, to whom the whole French nation was thus bound by innumerable ties of gratitude, who tried all means to make his people good, and great, and happy, this was he whom, after ensnaring him with a promise and a solemn oath, that his person should be inviolable and sacred, which when claimed for him they laughed at, they dared to brand with the name of Tyrant, and without being able to prove a single crime against him, to murder on a scaffold, the same men being his accusers, persecutors, judges, and executioners.

Gracious

Gracious heaven ! to what extravagance of wickedness will the passions of men hurry them, when not restrained by moral virtue or religion ! These dreadful scenes of injustice and cruelty are a disgrace to human nature, and should be taken as a warning by all men, as long as the world may last, to beware for their own sakes, for the sake of humanity, how, under the name of being made free, they consent to be made licentious. In these kingdoms particularly, where we are already *truly free* ; where we have long felt, and known, and justly boasted that we are so, where, by being so, we have long been rendered prosperous and happy ; it is a proof of the most profligate depravity to indulge or excite discontent, under the pretence of a want of liberty : or to teach and encourage opinions which lead directly and unavoidably to such horrors, as a man of any goodness or any feeling cannot bear to think of.

As the will of this much-injured King contains the strongest picture of the purity of his soul, who in the solitude of his gloomy prison could descend into his own heart, and, examining his conscience, with calm resignation, in the presence of his God alone, declare that "knowingly he never had offended any man," it is here subjoined.

It seems strange that his tyrannical persecutors should have suffered the publication of so affecting a testimony for him: but its authenticity is certain.

THE WILL OF LOUIS XVI.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

IN the name of the most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This 21st day of December, 1792, I Louis, Sixteenth of the name, King of France, having been now for upwards of four months confined with my family in the Tower of the Temple at Paris, by those who had been my subjects ; deprived of every communication whatever, even (since the 11th of this month) with my own family ; and besides, being involved in a criminal prosecution, of which it is impossible, considering the passions of men, to foresee the event, and for which no existing law can furnish any pretext or precedent ; having no witnesses to my thoughts, no one

to whom I may address myself but God alone ; here in his presence, do declare my last will, my last sentiments.

To God, my creator, I leave my soul, which I pray him to receive into his mercy, and not to judge by its own merits, but by those of our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself a sacrifice to God his father for us men, how unworthy soever ; and for me, the most unworthy. I die in union with our mother, the holy Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, whose powers are derived in an uninterrupted succession from St. Peter, to whom Jesus Christ had confided them. I firmly believe, and profess all that is contained in the commandments of God and the church ; in the sacraments and mysteries, as they are now taught, and ever have been taught by her : I never have pretended to constitute myself a judge, in the different modes of explaining the doctrines which divide the church of Jesus Christ, but

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have ever submitted, and if God shall grant me life, will ever submit to the decisions which the ecclesiastical superiors, in union with the holy Catholic church, have pronounced, or shall pronounce, in conformity with the discipline of the church, followed from the days of Jesus Christ. From my whole heart I lament those of our brethren who may be in error; but I presume not to judge them; nor do I the less, according to the dictates of Christian charity, love them all in Jesus Christ. I beseech of God to pardon all my sins. I have scrupulously endeavoured to know them, to detest them, and to humble myself in his presence. Not being able to obtain the assistance of a Catholic priest, I pray God to accept the confession which I have made of them to him; and above all, my deep repentance for having (though against my will) subscribed my name to acts, which may be contrary to the discipline and faith of the Catholic

tholic church, to which, in my heart, I have ever remained sincerely united. I pray God to accept my firm resolution, should he grant me life, to profit as soon as possible of the ministry of a Catholic priest, to accuse myself of all my sins, and receive the sacrament of penance: I intreat all those whom I may by inadvertence have offended, *for I cannot recollect that knowingly I ever have offended any one*, and all those to whom I may have given bad examples, or offence of conscience, to pardon me the evil which they think I may have done them.

I beseech all those who have charity, to unite their prayers with mine, to obtain from God the pardon of my sins.

From my whole heart I forgive those who, without any cause given them by me, have made themselves my enemies; and I pray to God to pardon them, as well as those, who through false or misguided zeal have done me much injury.

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I recommend to God, my wife, my children, my sister, my aunts, my brothers, and all those who are connected with me by the ties of blood, or in any other manner whatsoever.

I particularly implore the Almighty to look with an eye of mercy on my wife, my children, and my sister, who for a long time have been suffering with me; and if they should lose me, to support them by his grace, as long as they remain in this perishable world. I recommend my children to my wife. Of her maternal tenderness for them I have never doubted. Above all, I recommend to her to make them good Christians, and truly virtuous: to teach them to regard the grandeurs of this world (should they be condemned to try them) as dangerous and transitory advantages, and to fix their eyes on the only true and lasting glories of eternity. I intreat my sister to be pleased to continue
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her tenderness to my children, and to be to them a mother, should they have the misfortune to lose their own.

I intreat my wife to forgive me all the evils which she suffers on my account, and the vexations I may have given her in the course of our union; as she may be assured that I remember nothing against her, if she should have imagined that there is any thing with which she should reproach herself.

I very earnestly recommend to my children, next to their duty to God, which they ought to prefer to every thing, to remain always united to each other, submissive, and obedient to their mother, and grateful for all the cares she bestows on them for their own sakes, and in remembrance of me.

I intreat them to consider my sister as a second mother. I recommend to my son, if he should have the misfortune to become king, to remember, that he owes himself entirely

tirely to the happiness of his fellow-citizens ; that he ought to forget all hatred, and all resentment, and especially whatever relates to the misfortunes and miseries which I experience ; that he cannot effect the happiness of the people, but by reigning according to the laws ; but, at the same time, that a king cannot make the laws respected, and do the good which his heart wishes, but in proportion as he has the necessary authority ; and that without this, being fettered in his operations, and inspiring no respect, he is more injurious than useful. I recommend to my son to take care of all the persons who have been attached to me, as far as his situation shall give him the means ; to remember that this is a sacred debt which I have contracted towards the children or relations of those who have perished for me ; and next, towards those who have fallen into misery on my account. I know that there are many of those who were about my person, who have not con-

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ducted themselves towards me as they ought, and who have even shewn me ingratitude; but I forgive them; often, in moments of trouble and turbulence, a man is not master of himself; and I intreat my son, if he should have the power to punish, to remember only their misfortunes. I could wish to be able to testify my gratitude to those who have displayed a true and disinterested attachment to me. If, on the one hand, I was sensibly affected by the ingratitude and disloyalty of persons to whom I had never acted but with kindness, as well to themselves, as to their relations or friends; on the other, I have had the consolation of seeing the voluntary attachment and interest which many persons have shewn to me. I intreat them to accept of my thanks; in the situation in which things still are, I should be afraid of bringing them into danger were I to speak more explicitly; but I recommend particularly to my son to seek every

every opportunity of being able to discover them.

I should, however, conceive that I did injustice to the sentiments of the nation, if I did not openly recommend to my son Messrs. de Chamilly and Hù ; who were induced by their sincere attachment to shut themselves up with me in this mournful abode, at the risk of becoming the unhappy victims of that attachment. I also recommend to him Cleri, with whose attention I have had every reason to be satisfied since he has been with me. As it is he, who has remained with me to the last, I request Messrs. of the Common Council to deliver him my clothes, my books, my watch, my purse, and the other little effects which have been deposited at the Common Council Chamber.

I also most willingly forgive those who guarded me, for the ill-treatment and harshness which they thought it their duty to use towards me. I have found some feeling
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and compassionate souls; may they enjoy the heart-felt tranquillity which their mode of thinking ought to give them.

I intreat Messrs. de Malesherbes, Tron- and Deseze, to receive here my utmost thanks, and the assurance of my sensibility, for all the care, and all the pains, which they took for me.

I conclude by declaring, before God, and ready to appear in his presence, that I do not reproach myself with any of the crimes which are alledged against me.

Done in duplicate, at the Tower of the Temple, December 25, 1792.

(Signed) LOUIS.

(A true copy.)

BAUDRAIS, Municipal Officer.

